DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 214 209 CS 503 774

AUTHOR Eadie, William F.
TITLE The Relationship between Communicator Attitudes and Communication Behavior: Initial Evidence.
PUB DATE Feb 82
NOTE 19p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Attitude Measures; *Attitudes; College Students; *Communication Research; Higher Education; *Interpersonal Competence; *Psychological Patterns
IDENTIFIERS *Communicator Style; *Interpersonal Communication; Sensitivity

ABSTRACT

A study examined the relationship between communicator attitudes and communication behavior by having 122 college students complete the RHETSEN scale of communication attitudes and the Communicator Style Measure. The RHETSEN scale characterizes communication attitudes according to three communicator types: (1) the "rhetorically sensitive" (RS) person, who generally accepts the variability of communication and interpersonal relationships and does not try to avoid stylized verbal behaviors; (2) the "noble self" (NS), who sees any variation from personal norms as hypocritical and a denial of integrity; and (3) the "rhetorical reflector" (RR), who presents a different self for each person or situation. The Communicator Style Measure examines style along dominant, dramatic, contentious, animated, impression leaving, relaxed, attentive, open, and friendly dimensions. In examining the relationships between the three components of the RHETSEN measure and the nine components of the Communicator Style Measure, it was found that persons who scored high on the RS scale tended to see themselves as being less animated, relaxed, and impression leaving than others. Persons who scored high on the NS scale, on the other hand, tended to see themselves as being more dramatic, impression leaving, and attentive. The RR attitude was not associated with any general style of communication. (RL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED214209

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COMMUNICATOR ATTITUDES AND COMMUNICATION BEHAVIOR: INITIAL EVIDENCE

by

William F. Eadie

Department of Speech Communication
California State University, Northridge
Northridge, California 91330
(213) 885-2853

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

William F. Eadie

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CS503774

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COMMUNICATOR ATTITUDES AND COMMUNICATION BEHAVIOR: INITIAL EVIDENCE

The relationship between attitudes and behavior has long been of interest to communication researchers. While it is generally agreed that the relationship between the two is not always a direct one, there has been considerable disagreement as to what variables intervene in the attitude-behavior link (c.f., Steinfatt and Infante, 1976; Seibold, 1975; McPhee, 1975; Fairhurst, 1981).

One attitude which has come to interest communication researchers in recent years has been the attitude toward communication itself. An early attempt at describing one form this attitude might take was made by Hart and Burks (1972) in their article on "rhetorical sensitivity." Components of the rhetorically sensitive attitude were described in five ways: (1) acceptance of personal complexity, (2) avoidance of communicative rigidity, (3) interaction consciousness, (4) appreciation of the communicability of ideas, and (5) tolerance for inventional searching (Hart and Burks, 1972, 76 ff). Later writing by Darnell and Brockreide (1976) identified two other archetypal attitudes, the "noble self" and the "rhetorical reflector." The attitude of the noble self was characterized as holding primary in any communication the self and its needs, while the attitude of the rhetorical reflector was that the other's perceived needs were most important in communication.

Hart, Carlson and Eadie (1980) constructed a scale to measure relative identification with each of the three attitudinal types. While these

reported on a number of studies which were conducted for purposes of validating the scale, only two of these studies involved comparisons with behavior. In the first study, basic communication course instructors were asked to assess the degree of rhetorical sensitivity being displayed by their students. Students who scored high on the rhetorical sensitivity scale were rated as being more rhetorically sensitive by their instructors than were students who scored low on the scale. In the second study, sorority women successfully distinguished between friends who scored high on the noble self scale and friends who scored high on the rhetorical reflector scale from descriptions of the behavior associated with each position (Hart, Carlson and Eadie, 1980, 4). While these studies were useful in establishing predictive validity for the RHETSEN instrument, they did not reveal much about specific behavioral correlates of the attitudes tapped by that instrument.

Other studies have served more to clarify the construct of communicator attitudes than to link those attitudes with behavior. Craig, Johnson and Miller (1977) found that rhetorically sensitive attitudes were related to social attractiveness, while Fitzpatrick's (1976) dissertation discovered that rhetorically sensitive attitudes were more likely to be found among "traditional" couples than among "independent" partners. Both of these studies were hampered by the use of an earlier version of the RHETSEN scale, which was designed only to distinguish rhetorical sensitives from noble selves.

Two studies indicated that environmental forces might have an impact on communicator attitudes. Shulman (1980) found that students who were exposed to a basic communication course which emphasized "audience analysis"

were likely to identify more strongly with the rhetorically sensitive attitude than they were before taking the class. McCallister (1980) found that her plans to study relationships between psychological sex roles and communicator attitudes among a group of seniors majoring in management were disrupted when most of the students turned out to identify with the "noble self" attitude.

Two other studies supported the theoretical underpinnings of the rhetorically sensitive attitude. Kelly (1981) found that rhetorical sensitives were most likely to favor "secondary" or "more creative" means of accounting for untoward behavior. And, Bostrom's (1981) multidimensional analysis of a number of communication measures found that the rhetorical sensitive attitude was associated with both ratings of skill in speaking and estimate of overall communication ability.

Finally, two studies attempted to examine directly the communicator attitude-communication behavior link. Gilchrist, Browning and Bowers (1980) measured communicator attitudes of participants in a negotiation training workshop. They then categorized the negotiating behaviors of these individuals. Relating the attitudes with the behaviors indicated that noble selves were more likely to ask questions and were less likely to act cooperatively, while rhetorical reflectors were more likely to make proposals and to act courtiously. Carlson and Brilhart (1980) also provided some support for an attitude-behavior link, at least for noble selves and rhetorical reflectors. Their research indicated a significant positive relationship between identification with the noble self attitude and ratings of assertiveness and a significant negative relationship between identification with the rhetorical reflector attitude and the

assertiveness ratings. More interesting, however, was the finding that those whose attitudinal identification and assertiveness ratings did not fit the expected pattern were highly likely to have developed essential hypertension. This finding seems to indicate that while individuals may behave counter to their attitudes for long periods of time, they are likely to pay a physical price for such deviation.

In summary, to date investigations of communicator attitudes have found only weak links to communication behavior. A more comprehensive investigation of that linkage would appear to be warranted.

A convenient point at which to begin such an investigation would be to compare communicator attitudes with estimates of communicator style. As conceived by Norton (1978) communicator style is, "the way one verbally and paraverbally interacts to signal how literal meaning should be taken, interpreted, filtered, or understood" (1978, 99). Norton (1978) constructed a measure of nine dimensions of communicator style. These dimensions (and a sample item from the measure for each dimension) were: (1) dominant ("In most social situations I tend to come on strong"), (2) dramatic ("Often I physically and vocally act out what I want to communicate"), (3) contentious ("I am very argumentative"), (4) animated ("People generally know my emotional state, even if I do not say anything"), (5) impression leaving ("I leave people with an impression of me which they tend to remember"), (6) relaxed ("As a rule, I am very calm and collected when I talk"), (7) attentive ("I really like to listen very carefully to people"), (8) open ("I readily reveal personal things about myself"), and (9) friendly ("Most of the time I tend to be very encouraging to people"). As a result of extensive analysis, Norton argued that his instrument

represented a reasonably reliable and valid measure of the scope of communicator style.

Norton's research has been critized primarily on two grounds: (1) that measuring self-reports of communicator style may not correspond to the style perceived by others (Sypher, 1980; Talley and Richmond, 1980), and (2) that the dimensions of the communicator style measure are inter-correlated and are therefore of limited value in their use with other measures (Talley and Richmond, 1980; Scott and Nussbaum, 1981). Norton (1980) has responded to the first argument by specifying criteria for "good" self-report data and by contending that his measure meets those criteria. The criteria were: (1) a trusting relationship is established with the respondents; (2) a clear, operational definition of the construct is articulated; (3) a check is made to see whether the self-report questions are relevant or meaningful to the phenomenon at hand; (4) the responses are voluntary, anonymous, and are guaranteed to be strictly confidential; and (5) a wide range of variance is obtained (Norton, 1980, 95). Though Norton's original (1978) research found that his nine dimensions might be reduced to either two or three, to date he has not responded in print to the second criticism.

In short, this line of research investigates the general hypothesis that communicator attitudes and communication behavior are related. Following the suggestions of Glaser and Strauss (1967), the plan of this research program is to collect data on this relationship in various ways and to cross-compare the different findings for commonalities. The present paper reports on the first study in this series, a comparison of self-

report measures of communicator attitudes and communicator style.

METHOD

Subjects - Subjects were 122 students enrolled in a variety of speech communication courses at a metropolitan university in the western United States. Subjects volunteered to participate in the study during class time.

Procedures - The RHETSEN scale (Hart, Carlson and Eadie, 1980) and the Communicator Style Measure (Norton, 1978) were administered to subjects. The measures were completed anonymously, though subjects were able to create their own identification numbers so that feedback about the results could be distributed at a later time. Virtually all subjects took advantage of this opportunity. At no time was the researcher aware of the identity of the subject associated with any response, however.

RESULTS

Index construction - The RHETSEN scale is constructed so that many of the same items are scored in different manners to indicate the degree of identification with each of the three attitude types. This method of scoring confounds the raw scores, and Hart, Carlson and Eadie (1980) recommended partial correlation as a means of overcoming this difficulty. An alternative method of dealing with the problem was employed in this study. This method involved the construction of indicies for each of the three attitude types by removing the effects of the other two attitudes.

To construct these indicies, raw scores on the rhetorical sensitive (RS), noble self (NS), and rhetorical reflector (RR) scales were trans-

formed into standard scores by using the norm means and standard deviations reported by Hart, Carlson and Eadie (1980). To obtain an adjusted score for each subject on each scale, the sum of the standard scores for the other two scales were subtracted from the standard score of the scale in question.

This procedure allows the relative identification with each of the three attitude types to be quantified. To illustrate, let us compare two simple examples. Suppose that an individual scored one standard deviation above the mean on the RS scale and one standard deviation below the mean on each of the NS and RR scales. Our standard scores would then be 1 for the RS scale and -1 for each of the other two. The adjusted score would be obtained by subtracting -2 from 1, which would give us an adjusted score of 3. Let us suppose, however, that the subject's score on the RS scale was -1, that it was 1 on the NS scale, and that it was -1 on the RR scale. The adjusted score on the RS scale in this case would be -1. This manner of adjusting creates an index which favors identification with the scale in question, while penalizing for concurrent identification with either of the other two scales. Table 1 presents descriptive statistics associated with the three indicies for the present sample.

Table 1 about here

Data analysis - The three adjusted attitudinal indicies were entered into separate regression equations with the scores for the nine style variables. A simple multivariate regression was selected for use in this

analysis because such an analysis can adjust for correlations among dependent variables. Since the analysis is the multivariate case of a simple regression, the presumption can be made the the results would be the same no matter which variable was dependent and which independent. This consideration is an important one because there is as yet no evidence to indicate either the presence or the direction of causality in this relationship. The SPSS MANOVA program was used for the analysis, and an alpha level of .05 was established for all tests.

Two of the three regressions produced significant results. The RS scale yielded a canonical correlation of .42 and a Wilk's lambda of .821 (approximate F = 2.71; d.f. = 9, 112; p = .007). The NS scale yielded a canonical correlation of .46 and a Wilk's lambda of .788 (approximate F = 3.34; d.f. = 9, 112; p = .001). The RR scale's results were not significant, however. The canonical correlation was .25, and the Wilk's lambda was .936 (approximate F = .855; d.f. = 9, 112; p = .568).

Table 2 about here

Table 2 presents standardized and unstandardized regression coefficients and their associated tests of significance for the RS and NS scales. As is indicated in the table, identification with the RS attitudinal position was associated negatively with the animated, relaxed, and impression leaving style variables. On the other hand, identification with the NS position was associated positively with the dramatic, impression leaving, and attentive style variables.

DISCUSSION

This study attempted to provide initial evidence for specifying the relationship between communicator attitudes and communicator style. In examining the relationships between the RS, NS, and RR components of the RHETSEN measure and the nine components of the Communicator Style Measure, it was found that persons who scored high on the RS scale tended to see themselves as being less animated, relaxed, and impression leaving than others. Persons who scored high on the NS scale, on the other hand, tended to see themselves as being more dramatic, impression leaving, and attentive.

The results of the analysis for the NS scale contain only one surprise. It is easy to see how one whose attitude is concerned primarily with taking care of the self's needs in interaction might tend to characterize her/his communication behavior as being dramatic and impression leaving. One who enjoys being the center of communicative attention might find it easy to develop skills in making one's content vivid (e.g., jokes, anecdotes, stories). It is also easy to see how such a person could perceive that this sort of communication behavior could leave a definite impression on people. The surprise, however, is that noble selves perceived themselves as being attentive as a general style. Since the attentive items in the Communicator Style Measure dealt almost exclusively with listening behavior, one would not expect a noble self to be particularly concerned with such an other-oriented activity. Yet, the attentive behavior could result from a concern for how self's needs were being met in the interaction. If the noble self were not attentive, then the other might lose interest before the noble self's objectives could be met. As

Norton and Pettegrew (1979) pointed out, while attentiveness is a quality of empathy, one need not be empathic in order to be attentive.

On the surface, the results for the RS scale are befuddling. From previous writing, one would expect to find that rhetorical sensitivity would be positively associated with style factors which are thought to be marks of effective communication. Since both "relaxed" and "animated" tend to be positive communicator characteristics, it is more than a little unsettling to find rhetorical sensitives responding in the negative direction on those two qualities. Yet, these results may reflect more the individuals' perceptions of how communication is <u>generally</u> for them than how it is in any given situation. Hart and Burks (1972), for example, used the word "strain" to refer to the kind of adaptation in which a rhetorically sensitive person is likely to engage. If the process of communicating is generally perceived as being demanding, rather than easy, then the rhetorically sensitive person may experience communication as being a less relaxing activity than do those who do not identify with that attitude. Likewise, if the rhetorically sensitive person perceives communication generally as requiring tentative, thoughtful behavior, than that person may not respond to items such as, "I tend to constantly gesture when I communicate," in as positive a manner as would others.

Impression leaving, the third negatively associated style dimension, is open to question as to its admirability as a communication quality. Nowhere in the items which measure this dimension is there any mention of whether the impression left is considered to be a positive or a negative one. The noble self undoubtedly interpreted the leaving of an impression

as being a positive quality, but the rhetorically sensitive person may have felt that attempting to leave an impression is a mark of "trying too hard" in communicating. Perhaps the rhetorically sensitive person feels that it is better for others to have a vague memory of past conversations than to run the risk that the impression left will be a negative one.

One finding that is not surprising in retrospect is that the rhetorical refelctor attitude was not associated with any general style of communication. If, as Darnell and Brockreide (1976) noted, the rhetorical reflector is selfless, then that individual may be unaware of any general stylistic qualities that may have been developed. Lack of findings in this area does not mean that a general style may not exist; rather, it indicates instead that such a style may be perceivable only to observers.

It must be emphasized that these results should be viewed only as preliminary anchor points against which results from other methods of data collection may be compared. It may turn out, for example, that perceptions of <u>general</u> communication style are not very important in predicting how a person identifying with one of the communicator attitudes will actually behave in a given situation. If the situation is perceived to be one of high normative power (Jackson, 1975), then communication behavior could be highly predictable, no matter what the individual's attitude toward communication might be. If, on the other hand, the situation is perceived to be one of high rhetorical force (Eadie, 1981a, 1981b), then attitudinal orientations might be a necessary component of the rhetorical invention that is called for in such a situation.

The implications of this discussion are that (1) studies of others'

perceptions of an individual's communication style must be compared to that individual's communicator attitude for cross-reference purposes, and that (2) judgments of an individual's style within specific situations must be compared to that individual's communicator attitudes. Studies of this nature are currently in progress. Until they are completed, the results of the present research should be regarded only as preliminary evidence about the nature of what is likely to be a complicated relationship.

REFERENCES

Bostrom, R.N. Communication attitudes and communicative abilities. Paper presented to the International Communication Association, Minneapolis, 1981.

Carlson, R.E. & Brilhart, J.K. Communicative attitudes and perceptions of behavior: Predictors of essential hypertension. Paper presented to the International Communication Association, Acapulco, 1980.

Craig, R., Johnson, B. & Miller, R. Behavioral correlates of rhetorical sensitivity: An exploratory study. Paper presented to the Speech Communication Association, Washington, D.C., 1977.

Darnell, D.K. & Brockreide, W. Persons communicating. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1976.

Eadie, W.F. The immigrant and the eye: Influences of television on rhetorical force in Steve Tesich's "Eyewitness." Exetasis, 1981a, 7, 1 (June), 1-8.

Eadie, W.F. Rhetorical force and the study of organizational communication: Some preliminary notes. Paper presented to the SCA-ICA Joint Summer Conference on Alternative Approaches to the Study of Organizational Communication, Alta, Utah, 1981b.

Fairhurst, G.T. Test of a model of message-attitude-behavior relations. Western Journal of Speech Communication, 1981, 45, 252-268.

Fitzpatrick, M.A. A typological approach to communication in relationships. Dissertation, Temple University, 1976.

Gilchrist, J., Browning, L. & Bowers J. Rhetorical sensitivity in bargaining situations: A field study. Paper presented to the Central States Speech Association, Chicago, 1980.

Glaser, B.G. & Strauss, A. The discovery of grounded theory. Chicago: Aldine, 1967.

Hart, R.P. & Burks, D.M. Rhetorical sensitivity and social interaction. Speech Monographs, 1972, 39, 75-91.

Hart, R.P., Carlson, R.E. & Eadie, W.F. Attitudes toward communication and the assessment of rhetorical sensitivity. Communication Monographs, 1980, 47, 1-22.

Jackson, J. Normative power and conflict potential. Sociological Methods and Research, 1975, 4, 237-263.

Kelly, J.W. Behavioral accountability: A communicative description and analysis. Paper presented to the Western Speech Communication Association, San Jose, California, 1981.

McCallister, L. Verbal reprimanding among superiors: A profile of the noble self. Paper presented to the Central States Speech Association, Chicago, 1980.

McPhee, R.D. Derivation and test of a new model of message-attitude-behavior relations. Paper presented to the International Communication Association, Chicago, 1975.

Norton, R.W. Foundations of a communicator style construct. Human Communication Research, 1978, 4, 99-112.

Norton, R.W. The illusion of systematic distortion. Human Communication Research, 1980, 7, 88-96.

Norton, R.W. & Pettegrew, L.S. Attentiveness as a style of communication: A structural analysis. Communication Monographs, 1979, 46, 13-26.

Scott, M.D. & Nussbaum, J.F. Student perceptions of instructor communication behaviors and their relationship to student evaluation. Communication Education, 1981, 30, 44-53.

Seibold, D.R. Communication research and the attitude-verbal report-overt behavior relationship: A critique and theoretic reformulation. Human Communication Research, 1975, 2, 3-32.

Shulman, G. The effects of training on rhetorical sensitivity in the college classroom. Paper presented to the Central States Speech Association, Chicago, 1980.

Steinfatt, T.M. & Infante, D.A. Attitude-behavior relationships in communication research. Quarterly Journal of Speech, 1976, 62, 267-278.

Sypher, H.E. Illusory correlation in communication research. Human Communication Research, 1980, 7, 83-87.

Talley, M.A. & Richmond, V.P. The relationship between psychological gender orientation and communicator style. Human Communication Research, 1980, 6, 326-339.

ADJUSTED SCORE	MEAN	STANDARD DEVIATION	MINIMUM	MAXIMUM
Rhetorical sensitivity	0.167	2.588	-8.007	6.060
Noble self	0.083	2.221	-4.423	7.313
Rhetorical reflector	-0.016	1.691	-2.739	5.182

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for the Adjusted Attitude Indicies

	RS Scale			NS Scale		
STYLE DIMENSION	B	BETA	T	B	BETA	T
Dominant	-.135	-.090	-0.989	.028	.016	0.180
Dramatic	-.168	-.114	-1.259	.417	.243	2.746*
Contentious	-.049	-.040	-0.438	-.035	-.025	-0.270
Animated	-.290	-.187	-2.083*	.170	.094	1.033
Relaxed	-.231	-.187	-2.090*	.064	.044	0.485
Impression leaving	-.390	-.358	-4.200*	.516	.406	4.863*
Open	.089	.042	0.464	-.103	-.042	-0.460
Attentive	-.164	-.138	-1.527	.256	.185	2.062*
Friendly	-.249	-.163	-1.805	.100	.056	0.618

*p < .05

Table 2

Regression Coefficients for Style Dimensions on the RS and NS Scales